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Aristotle's Virtue Theory and *The Great Gatsby*

It has been without a doubt that F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* captivated millions of people. Combined with the Roaring Twenties, the Jazz Era crafted an American classic that symbolizes its prosperity within its pages. This novel focuses on the protagonist, the great Jay Gatsby, a multi-millionaire young man who lives on an island full of opportunities. Although Gatsby is not the narrator, readers get a deep plunge into his life and how he interacts with his world. By combining Aristotle's theories on virtues, we can see how Jay Gatsby, Nick Carraway, and Daisy Buchanan's personalities tie into the bigger picture. Without Nick's compliance, Jay's ambition, nor Daisy's superficiality, there would not have been such an American classic.

Commencing with the narrator, Nick Carraway is an essential character while simultaneously staying in the background. Throughout the novel, Carraway slowly moves to the forefront over time. He is an indispensable vehicle for the novel's message. Nick did not allow himself to give in to the other socialites' glitzy lifestyles. The others were superior to Nick in their social status but not their personalities. They were shallow, hollow, uncaring, and self-serving. However, this way of thinking led to more harm than good because he practically committed social suicide.

When Nick first meets the socialites in chapter one, he is not like them. His practicality and gracious attitude stand out too much for Nick to fit in. This essence persists throughout the following chapters, especially when Nick does not know how to respond to Tom and Myrtle's secret world. He bragged about his moral "superiority" when he said that Tom and Daisy "were careless people who smashed up things, retreated into their money and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (Fitzgerald et al. 170). Furthermore, chapter three highlights Nick as an outsider because of his patience with Jay Gatsby's invitation. (CliffNotes)

Unlike the other characters, Nick has a sense of personal integrity and morals which Fitzgerald wrote to mediate conflict. The phoniness of the socialites repulses Carraway. When Gatsby dies, Nick is the only one moved by his death, making sure that Gatsby is not alone. In contrast, the other socialites abandoned Gatsby behind because he was not relevant in their lives anymore.

However, Nick is not all virtuous since he can lean onto obsequiousness on occasion. He played the three-wheel in various situations. Nick allowed others to dominate his book, even if that was the purpose. However, in Nick's words, he suspects himself to be "one of the few honest people [he has] ever known" (Fitzgerald et al. 59).

If Nick did not have these vices, then he would have been more upfront with Jay and a bit less narcissistic in his ways. Talking it out with Gatsby and Daisy would have the most likely scenario because Nick is a natural peacemaker, and he appreciates harmony in others. Nick could have prevented the dilemma with Jay and Daisy, but he stayed on the sidelines to play it safe. However, eliminating Nick's vices could have ended *The Great Gatsby* prematurely. Thus there would have been less of a story.

Early on, the novel establishes Jay Gatsby as a charming dreamer who is gracious and mysterious. As the story unfolds, the readers learn more about what precipitates the mystery: a dream of recapturing the past (CliffNotes). Jay started with very little after he estranged himself from his family, who was already struggling financially. He reinvented himself with his ingenuity, but the only thing missing in his life was money.

Money was an issue that Gatsby needed to feel satisfied with his life. After meeting Daisy, everything Jay did was to woo her. Gatsby had a drive and perseverance in obtaining his lover. However, Gatsby's capital was actually from organized crime. For some context, this novel takes place in the 1920s, when liquor was illegal. Gatsby profited greatly from his alcohol sales when he "sold grain alcohol over the counter" at parties (Fitzgerald et al. 134). At his parties, people he barely knows showed up, and the only information that matters is if they knew Daisy. One instance of this bias was when Gatsby found out that Nick Carraway was Daisy's cousin.

Practically everything that Jay did was for Daisy. It was a blind pursuit because the more and more he focused on Daisy, the less connected to reality Jay became. By the end of chapter seven, Jay stood outside Daisy's house, waiting for a response. He was unable to realize that his fantasies were not necessarily reality. Throughout the novel, "Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not her fault, but because of the colossal [intensity] of his illusion" (Fitzgerald et al. 53). Gatsby was fatally idealistic as he sacrificed himself for Daisy when she killed Myrtle Wilson; his ambitions killed him.

Jay Gatsby's vice would surely be his overambition for Daisy. Gatsby once had her, and he wanted the past to come back. He saw a life of value as synonymous with one of wealth and prestige. These values are not virtues but vices of excess from intemperance. Both over-ambition

and overindulgence tie into Gatsby's motivations and idealism because these vices allow Gatsby to get what he wants (Daisy and status).

If Jay Gatsby were not materialistic nor did not have an exaggerated crush on Daisy Buchanan, the novel would have gone in a completely different route. Perhaps he would have realized that there were other fish in the sea instead of chasing after one person over and over. Jay would have to open his mind and allow himself to find others who might be more agreeable than Daisy. Love would be more important than material in this situation because Gatsby would fathom that someone would come to him eventually, regardless of his status.

Fitzgerald wrote Daisy Buchanan as one who was unworthy of Gatsby's unlimited devotion. She is the most enigmatic yet disappointing character in the entire novel. However, Gatsby sees a different version of Daisy, one built off of first impressions. Jay Gatsby first saw her when she was sitting on an "enormous couch buoyed up upon an anchored balloon. [Her dress] rippled and fluttered if [she] had been blown back in after a short flight around the house." (Fitzgerald et al. 7). From then on, Daisy was angelic and pure, with the associations building up over time.

As the story unfolds, Daisy reveals her true colors, and by the ending, it is clear that she is selfish, shallow, and hurtful. She is aware of her husband's infidelity. However, Daisy refuses to leave the relationship because of the status the marriage gives her. She also speaks negatively about her daughter Pammy. Daisy hopes that her child "would be a fool...[that is] the best thing a girl could be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (Fitzgerald et al. 21). Daisy treats her child as an object and only brings the child out of convenience, which shows her lack of concern and empathy.

Daisy only cares for the attention and status she gets with Gatsby rather than other considerations. Daisy is egocentric to a fault, as she does not care about her husband's issues nor her child. In chapter five of *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy stormily cries over Gatsby's shirts because his wardrobe validates his wealth (ENotes). She recognizes that she missed out on marrying Gatsby.

At other points in the novel, Daisy refuses to deny her relationship with Tom because of money. Her attachment to Gatsby was business-related, as she wanted the status tied to him. After Daisy hit and killed Myrtle Wilson and left the scene, it was apparent that she did not care. Her lack of conscience was striking, and the white symbolized with Daisy can represent the lack of virtues within her. Moreover, after Gatsby passed away, Daisy swiftly moves on with her life, indicating that she is egocentric and callous.

Daisy's superficiality is a significant driver of the plot. If she were mentally healthier, then *The Great Gatsby* would have been tedious to read. She would have more likely been an independent woman who does not care about the little things. Daisy would not be married to Tom because she would not rely on his money. Alternatively, Daisy would have been a minor character playing little to no role in Gatsby's life. However, this all depends if both Daisy and Jay were more virtuous because there would be a tug of power if Jay were not.

Without Nick's obsequiousness, Jay's obsession with status, nor Daisy's shallowness, there would not have been much of a story. With Nick not taking action in Jay's relationship with Daisy, he allows conflict to spiral. Jay Gatsby's vice was his obsessiveness. He wanted everything to do with prestige, and Daisy Buchanan embodied it. That does not mean it was the case for Daisy, but both she and Jay embraced similar desires throughout the novel. Moreover, it

is entirely understandable why F. Scott Fitzgerald brought Jay Gatsby to life to expose different perspectives of life during the Roaring Twenties.

Works Cited

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